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justout

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letters

Openly Annoyed

TO THE EDITOR:

I think we should come out of the Dark Ages and stop saying "openly gay"—at least in our newspaper, if not in other mainstream media—as a descriptive clause to identify certain candidates such as "openly gay" candidate Sam Adams or "openly gay" Supreme Court Justice Rives Kistler.

With this logic, should we say "openly straight" Amanda Fritz, for example? Or "openly straight" Tom Potter with an "openly gay" daughter? Or "openly straight" Rock Hudson before we all realized he had been a fairly successful closeted gay most of his life?

How long do the media have to say "openly gay" before it becomes so generally known that the phrase becomes annoying? I hope we're not going to be assaulted by "openly gay" for the rest of the mayoral campaign.

Imagine this in today's headlines: "openly Mexican," "openly Mormon," "openly female candidate Hillary Clinton." Ridiculous. Is "openly gay" any different?

Is there an implied intent behind the use of this phrase—conscious or not? By adding "openly gay," does the writer really mean "gay and proud"? Or is there the implication, "How dare gays be so bold and 'openly' in our face, flying in the face of all moral convention"?

I think it's the latter, and I think the continued use of this superfluous phrase makes us unwitting participants in the continuation of homophobia.

First, it's redundant to say "openly gay." If the distinction is truly worth noting, I suggest that we just say "gay candidate." And maybe it's not worth noting, since the sexual orientation of straight people is never tagged onto the mention of their names.

Maybe at this critical junction in our history, we should all come out of the closet in droves and all be "openly gay" so that the distinction loses its impact altogether. Maybe we should use "gay and proud." Or maybe nothing at all, because to continue to highlight this difference, as we know, can sometimes be a dangerous thing. Some of us have lost our jobs, our children, even our lives for that difference.

I would like to hear your reasoning for using the phrase. Maybe it's time to start some discussion around this topic.

NELL WAGENAAR

Portland

Be Who You Are

TO THE EDITOR:

I have spent several years as a bias crime police detective.

Throughout my tenure, I have witnessed disturbing trends concerning hate crimes legislation. My concern is Sen. Gordon Smith's proposal to add sexual orientation to the federal hate crimes law.

The addition would be outstanding, but Smith has got to realize the law will never pass to the extent of overriding a veto. I am confused as to why he continually attempts passing this law when he knows it doesn't stand a chance.

I am cynical enough to surmise that Smith is perhaps attempting to bolster his election chances in the Portland area.

He could have helped the community in real ways many times in the recent past. If he had not voted for a constitutional ban on gay marriage, it

would have certainly helped the community. If he had included gay youth as a specific group in his teen suicide bill, it would have also helped. (By some estimations, gay youth are three times more likely to kill themselves as straight youth).

I testified at the Oregon Legislature in support of adding the trans community to the state hate crimes law. I didn't hear a peep out of Smith during the process. (He is the ranking Republican from the state.)

I don't know how he can reconcile supporting divisive laws and at the same time call himself a supporter of the gay community. I dread watching the upcoming commercials with Smith touting his hate crimes law while talking about all he has tried to do for the community. I don't know for sure, but I would guess Smith will run the commercials in the Portland area and not other parts of the state.

Smith also got an 83 percent rating from the Christian Coalition, an organization that I'm fairly sure is not overly progressive when it comes to gay rights.

Be who you are, Senator. Do realistic deeds for the community. If you do win re-election and a progressive becomes president, please bring up the anti-hate law again. Prove me wrong and reverse your support for a gay marriage constitutional ban. Add gay youth to the suicide prevention law you passed. Be a maverick and not a player.

BRIAN GROSE

Beaverton

Playground Language

TO THE EDITOR:

As a gay man, I feel compelled to speak up when I hear or read things that disrespect people who are considered "different." And so I felt especially obligated to speak up when blatantly offensive language was printed in *Just Out* ["Casey's Causes Ruckus," Sept. 7].

To make matters worse, the derogatory words printed on the *Just Out* nightlife page were attributed to a young man who is presumably a double minority—gay and Latino. "It's a naughty, retarded dance party," he was quoted as saying. "You know, good retarded."

No, I don't know. What I do know is that people with developmental disabilities find the "r" word—even when spoken in jest—as disgusting and as hurtful as the "n" word and other slang that label and deride minority groups.

For some perverted reason, use of the words "retarded" and "retard"—once restricted mainly to school playgrounds—are now heard everywhere.

Usually the people who use them are trying to be cute or funny. But even when the intent is to amuse, the net result is hurtful to people with developmental disabilities, their families and their friends.

Help stamp out the "r" word. Think before you speak (or publish). Some words *do* hurt.

BILL LYNCH

Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities

Measure 50 Mystery

TO THE EDITOR:

I cannot seem to even begin to understand the linkage of higher tobacco taxes and health care provisions for our children. Who thought up this idea? The logic of this notion is indeed a mystery to me.